Overview of my experience in WW11

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During the summer of 1942, after finishing two years of college, I worked in the bank when my father was president. After my twentieth birthday on Sept. 27, 1942, I was inducted into service at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, on Nov. 13, 1942.

From Camp Shelby I went by troop train to Sausalito, California. Our arrival there was on December 2, 1942, and we were dispatched to Fort Cronkhite, a coast artillery battery located in a cove on the Pacific Ocean. At dust dark every day we put blinds in the windows of our barracks facing the ocean. I might add that, beside the officers, Sargents and Corporals, one hundred percent of the Company were from Mississippi.

Around the latter part of February 1943, One hundred and sixteen (116) were transferred to the 7th Provisional Scout Company at Fort Ord, California. Upon

our arrival there we sensed that this Company was organized for some special mission. Our Company Commander, William H. Willoughby was a six foot thirty four year old California dairy farmer, a great leader and respected by all of his men.

Our training at Fort Ord was severe. Our spud hikes were clocked at four (4) MPH with full field combat packs. We were trained by sargants who had participated in the Dieppe raid across the English Channel. Our sargants had been trained by British Commandos. Our hikes would last for an hour; then a break to strip to the waist and a half hour of exercise; then back to the hike. One day we were taking Calisthenics. Of course, our shirts were off. Suddenly a hail storm came up - we never stopped our exercise.

Around the first of April 1943 I was

transferred from the Scout Company to the Headquarters and Service Company of the 50th Combat Engineers. I never received any engineer training. This transfer came as a surprise to me, although I had been elevated to Company Clerk duty and mail clerk. Physically I was in good shape, having been a three sport athlete in high school and Captain of each.

On the 22nd of April 1943, we shipped by rail to San Francisco. It was from here that we boarded a Dutch ship (Tscdonna sp.) on April 24, 1943, while my friends with the Scout Company shipped out on submarines.

Attu was our destination. We were escorted by three battleships, six Cruisers, nineteen destroyers and a bunch of whales.

We arrived in Massacre Bay on May 11, 1943,

after a storm delay, anchoring at Cold Bay. If my memory serves me correctly I believe this storm was on Easter Sunday.

There was no resistance on landing in Massacre Bay. I did not debark until May 12, 1943.

My unit, 50th Combat Engineers, moved slowly up East Massacre Valley. Our job was to move supplies off the beach and to build a road from the beach on the hog-back that separated East Massacre Valley from West Massacre Valley. Since I had no engineer training and was assigned to the Headquarters Company there was nothing left for me to do but special detail. The detail work consisted of two trips up Gilbert Ridge (overlooking East Massacre Valley), One to rescue a lost comrade, the other to guard a pass to Sarana Bay. It must be noted that most of the snow had melted in the valley and the lower

level of the Ridge. However, the higher we climbed the more difficult it became. The area where the snow had melted froze overnight making it very slippery to climb because of the leather sole boots we were wearing. Once past this area we were walking in snow with no problems.

We were successful in rescuing our comrade on our first mission but guarding a pass with five soldiers armed with one BAR and four garand rifles seemed to me that we were being offered as sacrifical lambs in event the Japs approached from the east. But nothing happened.

After reaching Engineer Hill, around May 23rd or 24th, I was in a party of three detailed to rescue a comrade that was shell shocked. He had completely lost it, couldn't say a word but followed us back to camp

on Engineer Hill like a child would follow his father. The route we took to rescue this soldier was the same route that the Japs took a few days later when they made their banzai attack in the early morning of May 29, 1943.

On May 28th three of us pitched tent at the crest of one of the many ravines making its way up Engr. Hill. Later we decided that we would move up the hill fifty yards closer to the road the Engineers had built. Two other guys moved to the place we vacated.

Early in the morning of May 29th the Japs made their banzai attack. I assume that it was around 1:30 to 2:00 AM since it did not get dark until around 11:00 PM. It was in the AM that we heard shouting that the Japs were coming

and some had already gotten behind us. Immediately we made our way to the only refuge we knew, the road-bed behind us; but that was fifty yards away and everything was in disarray. All of us made it to the road-bed unscathed.

The Japanese approach was up the ravines of Engineer Hill. It probably provided them with some protection. The two comrades that moved to the place we had vacated were bayoneted in their sleeping bags.

Finally, after much difficulty, all of our troops were concentrated along the road-bed. Having this protection probably saved the lives of many of us but not all. A medical officer, John Bassett from San Diego was killed next to me. I didn't realize that he had been shot for I never heard a sound. Finally, I realized that

something was wrong because he was slightly slumped over and there was no movement. He had been hit squarely in the forehead. A stream at the foot of Engineer Hill was named after him - Bassett Creek.

I do not remember at what time the gun fire stopped. The ravines were full of dead Japs, stacked on top of one another. Perhaps you have seen pictures of the carnage. There was evidence that some had taken there own lives with hand grenades. This day was the only day that I experienced any combat.

After the Attu engagement we began to get settled. That did not last long for me for I was selected to participate in the invasion of Kiska. I left Attu in July 1943, and went to Adak as it was the staging area for the

troops going to Kiska. This invasion took place in August 1943. I landed at Gertrude Cove with some difficulty because of the rocky sea bed. It was quite foggy on Kiska which made it difficult to identify the enemy. However, the enemy was not there and we were fighting each other.

I left Kiska in September and returned to Attu. I spent the winter of 1943-1944 on Attu and in December 1944 returned to mainland U.S. We settled in Camp Funston, Kansas and in January 1945 I took my first furlough since my swearing in at Camp Shelby. It had been 26 months.

On March 1945 I was selected to attend Special Service school at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. This involved the various ways that

Our troops could be entertained as they returned to the States.

My next move was to Camp Gruber, Oklahoma in April 1945. In July 1945 we were sent to Chicago because of a truck drivers strike in the City. We sat with scab drivers so that the perishable food could be delivered. Apparently some agreement must have been reached for we left for Camp Gruber after two weeks.

In preparation for the invasion of Japan, the last of July we went to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana on maneuvers. This is where we were on VJ Day! Out in the woods with temperature at 103 degrees fighting mosquitos. Then back to Camp Gruber the latter part of August and preparation for discharge. Date of discharge was November 30, 1945.

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